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ODP-85-0097

16 January 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Personnel

ATTENTION: Chief, Position Management and Compensation Division

VIA: Deputy Director for Administration

FROM:

Chairman, DA Secretarial Task Force

SUBJECT: Report of DA Task Force on the PMCD Secretarial Study

1. The DA Task Force has completed its review of the PMCD's Secretarial Study and provides its comments and recommendations on the various proposals in the following paragraphs. The Task Force's consensus on the nine specific recommendations in the study are contained in paragraph six. In general, the Task Force found the study informative and supports most of its recommendations. The Task Force felt that the PMCD study has gone further than earlier reviews of secretarial career progression in developing a comprehensive solution to the problems discussed. The group believed, however, that additional study and analysis are required on particular issues before the proposed changes can be endorsed. For that reason, support for Option Two is qualified, pending clarification of several aspects of this proposal. Task Force members felt strongly that any changes in secretarial compensation and development be implemented as uniformly as possible throughout the Agency.

2. By way of background, the DDA formed a Task Force comprised of managers, secretaries, and other personnel from each office to review the study and to develop a Directorate response. The Task Force met on four occasions to discuss the report, including an initial session, in which PMCD representatives explained their methodology and amplified their findings. In subsequent meetings, the members discussed PMCD's recommendations, reached a consensus on which to support, and prepared a final report. Prior to developing a position, members of the Task Force disseminated copies of the study to secretaries and managers within their respective offices and solicited their opinions on the findings and recommendations. In some instances, meetings were held with office personnel to provide the opportunity for additional discussion. Task Force members felt somewhat handicapped in these meetings because of the lack of information on how the proposals for grade banding and certification would work. Nonetheless, comments from these discussions are included in this memorandum.

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3. The DA Task Force agreed with the basic findings of the study that most secretaries feel they reach a dead-end in their profession at the GS-07 level and they have few opportunities to advance themselves beyond that point. Statistical data in the report clearly show the bulk of secretarial positions--83.7%--are at the GS-07 level or below, resulting in a sense of frustration among junior secretaries who want to remain in the field and further their career. Task Force members considered this compression at the GS-07 level a festering problem which must be dealt with in a comprehensive manner now if the Agency is to retain talented secretaries and to benefit fully from their abilities. Task Force members also agreed with the finding that counseling opportunities for secretaries and training to enhance their skills for other jobs are limited. The Task Force's view was that training and counseling are inherently valuable to the organization and the individual, and should be important elements in any plan to relieve the grade compression problem at the GS-07 level and the sense of frustration that secretaries feel. OTE's current efforts to expand training for secretaries were considered a positive step, but they need to be tied to an over-all plan for secretarial development as the PMCD study indicates.

4. The Task Force felt that the more difficult problem identified in PMCD's study was the so-called "Professional Attitude Barrier"--the feeling among Agency secretaries that they are treated like second class citizens. Task Force members agreed with the finding that many secretaries lack a sense of professionalism because they are not fully integrated into the office team and because other employees consider a secretarial job as a stepping stone to more desirable employment. The Task Force also supported the finding that most managers do not fully use the capabilities of secretaries, preferring to employ them primarily for typing, filing, and dictation. It was not clear to the Task Force, however, how the PMCD proposal will address some of these attitudinal problems. While the options outlined will provide additional financial and advancement opportunities, they do not assure that secretaries will be treated better or be more fully utilized than they are today. Indeed, the study's emphasis on the development of a new secretarial pay system makes it appear that the primary solution to the problems of secretaries is money. The Task Force believed that the attitudinal problems will not be eliminated entirely by the certification program, although it should help to foster a greater sense of professionalism among secretaries. The panel hoped that follow-up PMCD actions will develop other approaches to deal with this problem.

5. Task Force members believed that of the recommendations presented, Option Two provides the more comprehensive approach to the problem of secretarial career development and has the best likelihood of success. While the Task Force recognized the advantages of abolishing the current secretarial grade pattern, it questioned how a new system will be implemented to ensure that current secretaries are not penalized and that the new system will be administered fairly. The DA Task Force, therefore, endorsed

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Option Two with reservations, pending clarification and further discussion of these points by a follow-on group. The Task Force also felt that the banding experiment in the Office of Communications should be carefully evaluated before it is adopted as the method of modifying the Agency's secretarial grade pattern. PMCD needs to explain more fully how banding will work and to convince secretaries that it is in their best interest to have this system adopted as the basis for their future financial compensation. With regard to the other options, the Task Force believed that Options One and Three offered only a quick fix to the grade compression problem. They do not address the attitudinal and job satisfaction issues that are central to the findings of the PMCD study and earlier studies. In the Task Force's view, Option Four is not viable and should not be seriously considered.

6. The Task Force's position on each of the nine PMCD recommendations is outlined below:

Recommendation #1. Agency managers and supervisors should be made aware of the fact that secretaries are considered professional employees and should be treated as such. Secretaries should be encouraged to become the best in their profession.

Endorse. However, PMCD needs to specify how this will be accomplished. The goal is unassailable, but meaningless unless steps are taken to ensure it will be carried out.

Recommendation #2. The role of the secretary should be broadened to include substantive responsibilities. Managers and supervisors should offer challenges to these professionals just as they would any other professional employee. They should be considered part of the office team and acknowledged as contributors to its mission and goals.

Endorse. Again, this objective is important to assuring the full utilization of secretarial skills. Delegation of responsibilities will not happen, however, without some stimulus from the top and a monitoring mechanism to enforce it. Certification will help this process, but there must be disincentives for managers who fail to comply.

Recommendation #3. Secretarial development, including counseling, training and awards review, should be established at the Directorate level.

Endorse. The Task Force felt, however, that there should be consistency throughout the Agency on how secretarial development is carried out. The Task Force recognizes that each Directorate has unique requirements which will necessitate some degree of latitude in implementing changes. Nonetheless, it felt that changes should be applied as uniformly as possible throughout the Agency.

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Recommendation #4. Managers and supervisors should be encouraged to use dictaphones and word processors instead of secretarial shorthand skills for better time management of both the manager and secretary.

Not Endorse. The Task Force believes that managers should have the option of using whatever means available to do their job. Many managers, particularly at the senior level, are more comfortable giving dictation to record their ideas. While shorthand should not be a requirement for promotion, this acquisition should be encouraged for those positions that still require this skill. The Task Force recognized that the required use of shorthand for some secretarial positions remains a volatile issue and needs to be clarified. It is suggested that a clear policy statement be issued on this matter.

Recommendation #5. The fact that shorthand is neither a requirement for advancement nor promotion in the secretarial profession should be re-emphasized.

Not Endorse. The Task Force felt that there has been too much effort made in de-emphasizing the value of this skill. As indicated above, it should still be required for some positions.

Recommendation #6. The Office of Training and Education should include techniques on managerial utilization of secretaries in all management and supervisory courses.

Endorse. The panel also believes that courses for secretaries should emphasize the need for secretarial interaction with managers. These courses should discuss how secretaries could take on additional responsibilities in the office environment.

Recommendation #7. Agency secretaries should be made aware of the fact that their salaries are in the top ten percent of salaries in the Washington, D.C. area.

Not Endorse. This recommendation appeared to Task Force members as unnecessarily demeaning to secretaries. Agency secretaries must meet the same high standards of conduct and professionalism as other employees. The fact that they are in the top 10% of salaries in the Washington, D.C. area should not be surprising; other categories of Agency employees undoubtedly enjoy a similar position vis-a-vis their non-government counterparts. Consequently, any possible salary advantage of Agency secretaries should not be singled out. The information on secretarial salary comparisons should be included in PMCD's final report, and reflect the entire compensation package, not just salary levels.

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Recommendation #8. PMCD will begin to evaluate all secretarial positions on an individual basis along with utilizing the Secretarial Grade Pattern to determine which evaluation gives the higher grade level.

Endorse. The Task Force believed that no current secretary should suffer a financial loss because of this reclassification of positions. This point needs to be emphasized in PMCD's final report and in any forum in which Option Two is discussed.

Recommendation #9. The Secretarial Grade Pattern should be abolished, Option One above which adds one level to the Secretarial Grade Pattern should be implemented as an interim measure, and planning for the Secretarial Pay Plan (Option Two above) should begin. An implementation plan is set forth on the following pages.

Endorse. This recommendation is endorsed with reservations pending further clarification of how banding and certification would work. The Task Force did support the implementation plan for Option Two which provides a measured approach that should ensure that the option is feasible and desirable before implementation. Task Force members also supported the adoption of Option One as an interim step toward a more comprehensive solution to the grade suppression problem. If a comprehensive approach like Option Two is not adopted, then Option One should not be implemented as the final solution to this complex problem. By itself Option One (and also Option Three) would provide only a quick fix, addressing an immediate problem, but not the underlying cause.

7. The Task Force also developed some recommendations of its own:

- That PMCD should make every effort to publicize the results of this Agency-wide review and provide progress reports on follow-up actions. This dissemination of information could be accomplished through employee bulletins, open forums, secretarial advisory groups, and the like.
- That a large number of secretaries be included in the follow-on task force which will develop the banding criteria and the certification program. The DA Task Force felt that secretarial participation in this process is essential to the success of any program which is adopted.
- That the concept of a secretarial career service be further explored. Task Force members felt that there may be more support for this concept among secretaries than the PMCD study shows. The mechanics of how such a career service would work need to be explained more fully. Indeed, the establishment of an Agency-wide career service could serve as a vehicle to ensure the uniform implementation of a new secretarial pay system.

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- That managers also be encouraged to acknowledge the contribution of secretaries through QSIs, Special Achievement Awards, and the like. The Task Force found that few secretaries receive such awards.
- That PMCD should undertake a study of the secretary's role in the office of the future. The Task Force felt that the office environment is changing steadily because of automation and that PMCD needs to anticipate the type of functions which secretaries will perform in the future. The current PMCD review focuses primarily on traditional roles and relationships.

8. Finally, the Task Force believed that some concrete action needs to result from the current review of secretarial advancement and compensation. The members believed that these problems have been studied enough and now is the time for action. Failure to address the issue at this time would cause further disillusionment among secretarial employees in the Agency. If PMCD would like to discuss any of the points raised in this report, the DDA Task Force would be pleased to clarify or amplify its positions. The Chairman can be reached on extension to arrange such a meeting.

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